

# Skills Identification

Employment experts agree that skills identification is essential to a successful job search. Employers want to know what you can do for them—not just what you have done for someone else. A knowledge of your unique skills is needed to successfully complete an application, write a resume, or answer interview questions. Skills identification is the first step toward new employment.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines a skill as "a great ability or proficiency, expertness that comes from training, practice, etc." A more simple definition would be to say that a skill is something you can do right now.

Everyone has skills, hundreds of skills, many of which employers are looking for in an employee. Yet most people can only identify a few skills and are generally unable to describe them to an employer. Employers need to hear what you can do. If you were looking to purchase a product that would cost you thousands of dollars a year for many years, you would also want to know what it could do. You are not ready to even begin approaching employers for employment until you can clearly tell them what you can accomplish. The more skills you have identified, the easier it will be to convince a potential employer that you have what it takes to be successful.

Skills may be broken into three categories: Job Content Skills, Self-Management Skills, and Transferable Skills.

## Job Content Skills

Job content skills are those skills specific to a job or occupation. A secretary is skilled in typing, word processing, answering telephones, company correspondence, and filing. An accountant would list accounts receivable, performing accounts payable, payroll, figuring taxes, using a 10-key adding machine, and computer accounting programs. A salesperson would include customer service, record keeping, order processing, inventory management, billing, and product displays.

Job content skills are important to employers for obvious reasons. These are the specific skills they are looking for in a candidate to accomplish the duties of the job. Job skills do not always come from employment. Along with the skills you used in previous jobs, you may have developed job skills through education, hobbies, community activities, and life experiences. Common activities such as shopping, managing finances, balancing a bank account, hosting a party, and teaching a child all contain potential job skills.

## Self-Management Skills

Sometimes called "personality traits," these self-management skills are the skills you use day-by-day to get along with others and to survive. They are the skills that make you unique. Sincerity, reliability, tactfulness, patience, flexibility, timeliness, or tolerance are exam-



## What are Your Skills?

Job skills do not always come from employment. You may have developed job skills through common activities such as:

- balancing a bank account
- shopping
- budgeting and/or managing finances
- hosting a party
- teaching or caring for a child
- hobbies
- interacting with others ("people skills")
- organizational skills

ples of self-management skills. Employers look for these skills in candidates as evidence of how they will “fit” into the organization. How a person will “fit in” is an important consideration for employers.

## **Transferable Skills**

These are skills that can transfer from one job or occupation to another. They may be either self-management or job content skills, and may or may not have been developed through previous employment. For most job seekers it is very unlikely that they will find a job that is identical to their previous employment. For many today, that new job will be totally different from their past experience. Therefore, it is critical for successful job seekers to carefully evaluate how their skills transfer into other opportunities. It is also important to look for ways to express this transferability to a prospective employer.

## **Duties**

Many people have trouble distinguishing between their skills and duties. Duties are the basic functions of an activity. Skills are the tools used to accomplish these functions. Duties or functions are a part of any organized activity, whether it is employment, volunteer work, or hobbies. A simple example is the management of a lemonade stand. The basic duties of a lemonade stand owner might be to manage lemonade operations including production, marketing, distribution and finances. There are many skills needed to accomplish these functions including: mixing, measuring, planning, sales, customer service, writing, cash handling, record keeping, maintenance, timeliness, dependability, accuracy and motivation. A complete list of skills would be very long. Writing out the duties or functions of an activity first can be a useful way to begin identifying skills. When presenting your skills to

an employer, it is best to tie them to specific activities in which they were used. It is not enough to tell the employer your skills; you need to be prepared to tell where, when, and how you used those skills.

## **Writing Your Skills**

Identifying, listing and describing your skills is not an easy task. However, it is critical to job search success and you should plan to invest the time needed. Listed below is an outline for skill identification that has been successfully used by many job seekers.

- 1.** List by title any jobs you have held. Start with your most recent employment and work backwards.
- 2.** Write a detailed description of four to five major duties.
- 3.** Think of all the skills needed to accomplish each duty you have listed. Write those skills down on a piece of paper. Remember to look for both job content and self-management skills. Be sure to include tools used, machines operated, knowledge applied, etc.
- 4.** Repeat the above steps for each activity you anticipate describing to an employer either on an application, resume or in an interview. Use this same process for other work-related activities including hobbies, volunteer work, and community experience.
- 5.** Once you have completed this process, you should have a long list of skills - a list too long to tell an employer. Go through the list and select those skills that match your job goal(s). These are the skills you will use in your job search effort.



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